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Global Issue Projects in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract

This chapter will focus on the design and implementation of content-based classroom ESL/EFL projects built around "global issue" topics linked to themes such as peace, human rights and the environment. It will explain how second language project work designed from a global education perspective aims both at the development of language skills and at the promotion of global awareness, international understanding and social responsibility. The chapter will outline the features of a global education approach to foreign language teaching, discuss key factors to consider in designing ESL/EFL project work around world problems and social issues, and describe examples from different parts of the world of global issues project work by second language students.

Introduction

What is your opinion? When you manage to get away from the everyday emergencies of dealing with classes, family, and the other aspects of a teacher's life and look at what is going on in the world, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the human race and of our fellow residents on the planet Earth? Do you believe that we in our role as second language teachers can have any impact on what is going on in the world, or should our teaching concentrate solely on improving our students' language proficiency?

In this chapter, we propose an optimistic view of the future of this planet. We propose that as our tiny globe spins round the Sun, we second language teachers can play a role in making this world a better place at the same time that we improve our students' language proficiency. The means by which we and many of our colleagues have been attempting to do our part for the planet lies in the use of global education projects as a component of the second language curriculum.

This chapter has three main parts. First, we describe what global education entails and provide a list of organizations of second language teachers who include global education in their teaching. Second, we describe how global education links with trends in second language instruction and, in particular with

the use of projects in second language instruction. Third, we provide specific examples of global education projects done by students as part of their second language development and highlight key elements of these projects and pedagogical issues arising from the projects.

What is Global Education

Definitions

Global education came into prominence in the last third of the 20th century. Two definitions of this field are:

> Global education is the lifelong growth in understanding, through study and participation, of the world community and the interdependency of its peoples and systems - ecological, social, economic, and technological (Sny, 1980, p. 3)

> Global education involves learning about those problems and issues which cut across national boundaries and about the interconnectedness of systems—-cultural, ecological, economic, political, and technological. Global education also involves learning to understand and appreciate our neighbors who have different cultural backgrounds from ours; to see the world through the eyes and minds of others; and to realize that other people of the world need and want much the same things (Tye, 1991, p. 5)

Several points in the above definitions merit highlighting. Sny emphasizes that global education needs to be part of a lifelong process, not just something studied for a test, and that the world is an interdependent community, not just separate nations. Tye's definition also underlines our global interdependence. Plus, he directs our attention to the importance of the affective, such as cultural understanding and empathy. However, one area is, we believe, missing from the two definitions. With the

growth of the concept of animal rights/welfare and efforts to address speciesism (Dunayer, 2001), definitions of global education should be expanded to include not just humans but also other sentient beings.

Topics in global education

Topics within the realm of global education include sexual preference, peace, women's issues, environmental protection, development (including eliminating hunger and poverty), human rights, protection of nonhuman animals, AIDS education, and cross-cultural understanding. The use of such global education topics may be seen as bringing bad news into the classroom, causing students to feel depressed and unmotivated. No doubt, there is much in the world to be sad about, but at the same time, there is much happening to celebrate. Some all-too-familiar examples of the bad news include wars, poverty, racism, disappearing species and rainforests, discrimination against women and those of different sexual orientation, and apathy in the face of all these problems. On the bright side, we can see in the news and in our own lives examples of peace returning to war-ravaged lands, sustainable development helping to lift people from poverty, people of different races living, working, and learning together harmoniously, protection of endangered species and establishment of protected forests, people working to overcome discrimination and standing up against injustice, and all of this happening because people, including students and their teachers, do care and do believe that they can make a difference.

Teaching methods for global education and global education organizations of L2 educators

Global education should be seen not just as a set of topics but also as an approach to teaching (Cates, 1990; Greig, Pike, & Selby, 1987). Pedagogical methods and techniques consistent with global education include thinking skills (Benesch, 1993), focus on meaning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), Freirian methods (Graman, 1988), collaborative skills (Bejarano, et al., 1997), cooperative learning (Baloche, 1998), service learning (Kinsley & McPherson, 1995), content-based language teaching (Crandall, 1987), and project-based learning (Ribe & Vidal, 1993).

Many second language instructors can be found among the ranks of those educators trying to make a difference by inviting their students to take part in global education. One way that second language educators attempt to have an impact is via global issues subgroups within professional organizations. Examples include the *Global Issues* Special Interest Group (www.jalt.org/global) of the *Japan Association for Language Teaching* (JALT), the *Language and Gender* and the *Language and Ecology* Scientific Commissions of AILA (*International Association for Applied Linguistics -* www.aila.info), the *Global Issues* Special Interest Group (www.countryschool.com/GISIG/about.htm) of IATEFL (*International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language*), and the *TESOLers for Social Responsibility* (TSR) Caucus (www2.tesol.org/mbr/caucuses/tsr.html) of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). Additionally, UNESCO founded Linguapax (www.linguapax.org), an organization that works to put language to the service of peace.

Global Education, Second Language Instruction, and Project Work

Global education and the paradigm shift in education

Global education represents more than just a source of content for second language instruction. Pedagogy is also involved. Indeed, global education fits well with an overall paradigm shift in education (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). The previously dominant paradigm flows from positivist perspectives including behaviorist psychology, whereas the alternative paradigm springs from post-positivism including socio-cognitive psychology. Table 1 compares the two paradigms and lists some of the ways that this alternative paradigm fits with the integration of global education projects in L2 instruction.

Formerly Dominant Paradigm in L2 Instruction	Alternative Paradigm in L2 Instruction	Global Education	Project Work
Emphasizes parts and	Emphasizes wholes	Emphasizes that the	Offers students

decontextualization (e.g., individual grammar features)	and contextualization (e.g., whole texts)	world is interdependent and that issues must be understood in context	opportunities to look at the big picture
Separates language from other subjects	Uses content-based language teaching	Provides content for language learning	Offers time to delve into content and to learn content language (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Mohan, 1986)
Sees learning as preparation for life	Sees learning as also being participation in life	Provides ways to participate in improving the world	Involves students in tasks via which they can help others (e.g., service learning)
Attempts to standardize the way learning takes place and what is learned	Encourages diversity as to ways of learning and content of learning	Encourages understanding of diversity, rather than fear of what is different	Allows students to learn in different ways and pursue personal interests
Promotes teacher-centered instruction	Encourages student-centered learning	Promotes lifelong learning and involvement	Allows students choice in the projects they undertake
Uses mostly whole-class and individual work	Includes group activities	Encourages students to work with others and to care about what happens to others	Is normally done in groups
Focuses on the product; assessment	Focuses on the process as well as product;	Emphasizes complexity of global	Involves students in displaying their

via discrete point instruments (e.g., questions with right/wrong answers)	assessment via a range of tools (e.g., questions with many possible good answers)	issues and differing perspectives	learning in various ways and thinking about the process they used to build their understanding
Sees teacher control as key; teacher assessment only	Encourages teachers to share responsibility with students; peer and self-assessment also used	Emphasizes that people must understand for themselves and take actions based on their own views	Gives authority to students to plan their work, carry out their plan, and monitor their performance

Table 1 – Comparing two paradigms in second language instruction and linking the alternative paradigm to global education and project work.

Specific examples of links between global education and the new paradigm

Several prominent features of the alternative paradigm in second language education fit well with global education and project work. One, this paradigm emphasizes a holistic approach to language learning, similar to the Whole Language Approach in L1 learning (Goodman, 1986). Aspects of wholeness in regard to language include using whole texts in a whole-part-whole cycle in which students begin with whole texts and notice particular parts and features of those texts. Carter (2003) calls this language awareness. Later, students create whole texts of their own, perhaps in collaboration with peers, using the same parts and features. Global education content offers whole texts on a wide range of topics. Students read and listen to these texts as they do research for their projects. Not only do students learn content as they read and listen, they can also be guided to learn about the language used and then to apply that knowledge when they create their own texts. Additionally, the meaningful content provided by global education topics combines with the engaging nature of project tasks. This combination can increase

students' motivation to master language so as to successfully use it as a tool for completing projects and for future endeavors.

A second aspect of the alternative second language education paradigm that links with global education and projects involves providing choice to students. Learner autonomy (van Lier, 1996) is a term often used for this trend in education. Global education encourages learner autonomy by offering a wide range of topics for students to learn about. More importantly, central to global education is that people participate in the world and make their own choices rather than only following their leaders. Projects invite students to choose, as they work in less teacher-controlled settings and have some freedom on what topics or sub-topics they choose as well as what shape their projects take.

A third strand linking the alternative second language instruction paradigm with global education and projects involves integration. Global education urges the integration of the cultural, ecological, economic, political, and technological. Indeed, global education is by its very nature cross-curricular. The longer-term nature of projects, as opposed to short assignments finished in one class period, makes projects ideal for integrating a range of subject areas with language learning. Another form of integration encouraged by global education involves the linking of classroom activities to students' lives beyond the classroom and to the wider world.

Global Education Projects by Second Language Students

This section presents a variety of global education projects done by second language students. They are presented with the permission of the teachers who developed the projects and are listed in order from classroom-based projects to community-based projects to international projects. The projects listed, of course, represent only a few examples of many, many possibilities. Of course, any project will need to be adapted to local contexts and to students' language level, learning needs, and interests.

A student-produced global issue essay collection

Type: Classroom-based project

Teachers: Masaharu Nagasaki and Carole Ray (Nagasaki, 2001)

Activity: During a two-semester course, students develop their English skills as they study a variety of world problems. The first semester, entitled *Global Studies*, focuses on lectures, readings, discussion, and paragraph writing on global issue topics. The second semester, *Essay Writing*, introduces students to computers and to basic essay writing skills (outlining, writing, editing). The course culminates in a class booklet, entitled *Our Windows to the Globe*, which contains student essays on a variety of global themes. These range from topics such as war, peace and pollution to overpopulation and development issues.

Comments: (a) Student writing can provide real reading for classmates and future students. (b) Also noteworthy is the way students developed their writing skill and knowledge of global issues before embarking on this project. While students can develop language skills and issue knowledge through doing projects, we must not assume that either will develop on its own. We need to pay attention to how we can help students learn before, during, and afterwards. For example, we can facilitate students' understanding of the text type they will be writing in (Derewianka, 1990), in this case, exposition.

Service learning projects with environmental organizations

Type: Community-based project

Teacher: Karen Mattison Yabuno (Mattison, 2003)

Activity: After studying about the environment, students spend 20 hours volunteering with an environmental protection organization of their choice. These organizations can include ones that seek to protect endangered species, as well as animals living on highly polluting factory farms (Vegan Outreach, retrieved 7 May, 2005）. Students keep a scrapbook and do a presentation based on their volunteer experience.

Comments: (a) Service learning (Kinsley & McPherson, 1995) links the classroom with the outside world by combining service to others with learning related to students' academic curriculum. Service projects designed within a service learning approach differ from service projects which have no link to the curriculum. Service learning projects offer a rich vein of possibilities for combining language and global education. (b) The students' scrapbooks and presentations provide a language focus. Both the scrapbooks

and the presentations can be done in groups, with feedback from group members and from other groups. An example of intragroup feedback is after a group brainstorms the content and organization of their scrapbook, each group member can be responsible for the first draft of one part and then receive feedback on that draft. An example of intergroup feedback is instead of whole-class presentations, in which one person per class talks at a time (what Kagan, 1994, calls *sequential interaction*), groups can present to other groups (i.e., *simultaneous interaction*) and receive feedback from their audience, thereby increasing the amount of student talk. (c) Furthermore, the combination of cooperative learning and writing tasks integrates all four language skills, as students write, read what groupmates have written, talk to groupmates about ideas, and listen to groupmates' responses and feedback. (d) Students should have choices in the topics of their global education projects. For instance, if some students are not interested in environmental issues, they could volunteer with another type of organization. Or, taking the concept of student choice a step further, if some students disagreed with the goals of organizations with which classmates were volunteering, they could volunteer for organizations with opposing views. The goal here is to promote informed, involved, self-motivated citizenship, rather than to foster action on behalf of the teacher's or the majority of classmates' views.

Interviewing survivors of World War II

Type: Community-based project

Teacher: Jerry Burks (Burks, 1999)

Activity: Students use a set of criteria to interview Japanese senior citizens who lived through the turmoil of WWII in Okinawa. These interviews are written up in English, compiled, and distributed as a way to keep alive memories about local people's experiences, the cruelty of war and the need to work for peace.

Comments: (a) Connecting students with older members of their communities brings together two groups who often have little interaction but who can benefit from shared activities. Students can provide a genuine service to their community by recording and maintaining memories of the past, and students have much to learn from interacting with elders. (b) The language component flows principally from the

written records that students produce. This record offers engrossing material for extensive reading by future students (Robb, no date) although careful editing is often necessary before student-created texts are ready for use by others. For example, peers can read first drafts and provide feedback on the content. This can help students make their writing more reader-friendly, while students learn ideas for the own writing by reading their peers' drafts. Later, students can check peers' subsequent drafts for such matters as grammar, punctuation, and formatting. Final editing can be done by teachers.

Learning about visual impairment and other disabilities

Type: Community-based project

Teachers: George Jacobs and Loh Wan Inn (Jacobs & Loh, 2002)

Activity: After reading about visually impaired people and how they cope, students pair up to simulate what it is like to be visually impaired. One person pretends to be visually impaired, while their partner ensures that nobody is hurt. Students then reverse roles. After each simulation, students write about how they felt during the simulation, using the past continuous tense. Next, students investigate what forms of support are available on their campus and in their community for the visually impaired or people with other physical challenges. They also investigate what types of support are available in other places and are desired by physically challenged people. Based on their investigation, students formulate what they believe are realistic recommendations and seek to have them implemented.

Comments: (a) Evaluation is a crucial thinking skill. If global education projects are to have an impact, they must be carefully thought out and not done just to get the project over with because it is a graded assignment. Therefore, students' projects must be practical, rather than only sounding wonderfully idealistic. One aspect of being practical is that students have a realistic chance of seeing some impact within the normally brief time span of a project. That said, the hope would be that students will become so excited about their project that they will want to continue pursuing it after the required time span or that other students will wish to take it up. (b) On a language note, having students consider the use of a

specific tense in their writing as part of the project is an example of how to maintain a focus on language usage within the overall emphasis on language use that is an essential characteristic of projects.

Investigating the fishing industry and alternatives

Type: Community-based project

Teacher: Syahrir Mappe and Nurnia ((Lie, Jacobs, & Amy, 2002)

Activity: Students learn about local fishing practices, including unsustainable ones, such as dynamite fishing. They also learn about nutrition and about plant-based alternatives to eating marine animals. This learning takes them out of the classroom to interact with fishers, food marketers, and nutritionists. Students disseminate their findings in the form of discussions, skits, and articles. Most of these are done in the first language, but second language versions are prepared for feedback from classmates, teachers, and overseas experts, as well as for presentation to other English classes.

Comments: (a) One type of action that students can readily take is educating others. Too often, these education efforts are confined to their teachers. We should look for ways to expand students' reach, so that they present to others beyond the other people in their class. (b) Food was a focus in this lesson. In our increasingly globalized world, what we eat offers many ways for students to have an impact. Examples of global issues related to food include organic food, genetically modified food, vegetarianism, and fair trade. (c) A concern often raised in foreign language situations is that students have little opportunity for communicative use of the target language. Here, this was overcome by students using the target language with classmates and teachers to prepare, critique, and present their out-of-class efforts before translating these into the first language for interaction with the public. In this way, being in an foreign language context does not preclude reaching out to the local community. Indeed, it prepares students for the kind of code-switching that many fluent bilinguals engage in. (d) The inclusion in this project of nutrition via plant-based sources suggests that students think about reducing their consumption of other animals and encourage other humans to consider the same step. This fits with the global education topic of protection of nonhuman animals.

Learning from traditional culture

Type: Community-based project

Teacher: Leonora Saantje Tamaela (Lie, Jacobs, & Amy, 2002)

Activity: Students investigate traditional practices in regard to the environment and other areas. Teachers begin by relating their own experiences. For example, in some Indonesian villages, farm families have a tradition of donating part of their harvest to the poor. Students evaluate these practices as to whether they offer advantages over current practices. Finally, students and teachers attempt to influence others to maintain or adopt traditional practices that students feel are beneficial.

Comments: (a) Education is seen by some as teaching students to adopt modern ways and to reject tradition. Such wholesale acceptance of the present/future and rejection of the past may not be the best course to take. As seen in this lesson, traditional practices may in some regards be more environmentally-friendly than modern ones. Also, with specific relation to the confluence of language education and global education, one aspect of human rights is linguistic rights. Unfortunately, many languages are disappearing, with a small set of languages, led by English, becoming increasingly dominant. Respecting tradition can mean attempting to preserve languages associated with traditional cultures (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). (b) Another aspect of the lesson worth noting is the fact that teachers are involved as co-learners. This relates to the paradigm shift discussed earlier, in particular to the move away from a student-teacher relationship in which teachers reign from in front of the class and issue do-as-I-say edicts. Instead, teachers participate along with students.

A collaborative environmental project to promote language learning and computer skills

Type: International project

Teachers: Janpha Thadphoothon, Regina O'Shea, Libby Smith, and Junko Kosaki

Activity: Classes in two countries are paired. Each class collects primary data on an environmental problem in the area near their school. They use the Internet and a range of computer tools to exchange

information with the class in the other country. Students ask questions and make suggestions about the other's problem. Then, in consultation with the other class, students formulate and implement plans for addressing the environmental problem they have investigated.

Comments: (a) The Internet offers a wealth of possibilities for students to engage in real communication about global topics. (b) Knowing about the efforts of peers in another country can inspire students to boost their own efforts. (c) Another example of an Internet project is constructing a website to spread information and enlist support for addressing a global issue. (d) When conducting projects using the Internet, we must be sensitive to the digital divide (i.e., the fact that not everyone has the same level of hardware and software, and access to a constant flow of electricity). For example, while some students may have high-speed access in their homes, capable of sending and receiving video, other students (and their teachers) may need to rely on sporadic Internet access with very slow connections. (e) Global education projects must not be condemned to the all-too-common category of work done only for a grade, only because the teacher assigned it, or only as preparation for an exam. Instead, when students embark on a global education project, they should have a vision of who will benefit from their efforts.

An "Asian Youth Forum" EFL student exchange program

Type: International project

Teacher: Kip Cates (Cates, Lachman, & Perry, 2001)

Activity: EFL teachers and students from a number of Asian countries meet together, with one nation hosting the others, for an "Asian Youth Forum" (AYF) aimed at promoting international understanding. Teachers and students, especially in the host country, need to do a great deal of preparation to facilitate this event. During the forum, students study together about leadership skills, cultural differences, stereotypes, and global issues such as peace, human rights, and the environment. While in the host country, visiting students stay with the families of host-country students who act as guides to the local culture. Visiting students teach local hosts about their own society. Students – both visitors and hosts –

can maintain journals of their experiences. Furthermore, communication continues after the visits have ended, and plans are made for future trips in which the roles of visitor and host are switched.

Comments: (a) This project fits with the peace and cross-cultural areas of global education. (b) Negative stereotypes and generations-old ill-will often plague relations between people from different countries. Much can be done in the classroom to address these noxious beliefs. However, face-to-face interaction and visits to each other's countries may well be the most effective means of overcoming misunderstandings and moving toward mutual understanding and harmonious relations. For instance, these exchange programs have been used with success to bring together students from Korea and Japan, two countries with a history of animosity. (c) From a language acquisition perspective, when the target language acts as the lingua franca for student-student interactions, an immersion situation is created ripe with opportunities for communicative language use. Furthermore, students see the utility of second language acquisition, potentially increasing their motivation. (d) Another way to promote cross-cultural interaction is for second language students to teach about their culture to younger students from the host country (e.g., university ESL students in the U.S. teach about their home cultures to local elementary school students) (Carter & Thomas, 1986).

Conclusion

We began this chapter by stating our optimism about the ability of second language students and teachers to have a positive impact on the future of the human race and on our fellow residents on Planet Earth. Global education projects offer an outstanding way to have such an impact. This chapter has outlined what global education involves, described ways in which global education projects can contribute to second language acquisition as they positively impact the planet, sketched examples of global education projects done by second language students, and highlighted lessons that can be learned from these examples.

The chapter also provided a list of organizations which promote global education. It is by recommending these organizations for readers' consideration that we would like to conclude this chapter.

Both of us have been involved with establishing and managing such groups. We know the frustrations that are inescapable in any conglomeration of volunteers who have full-time jobs and are spread across the globe. Despite the convenience and speed that modern communication technology offers, and despite the genuine desire of many education professionals to do their part to promote global education, much of the work in such organizations too often falls on the shoulders of too few members.

Nonetheless, we believe in the role of organizations of second language educators dedicated to global education. These organizations inspire us when we hear about what other educators and their students are doing, give us pride when we share the excitement of what we and our students have done, inform us when we learn about global education resources that are available and appropriate to our students' language level, and connect us when we meet global education colleagues at face-to-face at conferences or online and when we establish ties for our students with others around the world. All these benefits enrich our use of global education projects in our second language teaching and make the organizational frustrations worth bearing.

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